

March 13, 2024

RE: Support for HB 196, HB 198 and SB 149, Food Stamp Program Eligibility

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee,

The joint mission of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) and the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) is to advocate for programs and services that promote healthy, independent, productive Alaskans. AMHB/ABADA are statutorily charged with advising, planning, and coordinating behavioral health services and programs funded by the State of Alaska. The Boards offer the following comments on HB 196, Food Stamp Program Eligibility.

The Boards would like to express wholehearted support for HB 196, HB 198 and SB 149 which will expand eligibility to the state food stamp program. We believe that this legislation is not only a crucial step towards addressing food insecurity but also a significant investment in the mental health and well-being of our community members.

Food insecurity is a pervasive issue that affects individuals and families across our state. Lack of access to nutritious food not only poses immediate health risks but also has profound implications for mental health and substance use. Research consistently shows that food insecurity is linked to increased stress, anxiety, and depression, exacerbating existing mental health challenges and contributing to the vulnerability of individuals to substance use.

By expanding eligibility to the state food stamp program, we have the opportunity to alleviate the burden of food insecurity on our citizens, promoting overall well-being and mental health. Adequate nutrition is a fundamental pillar of mental and emotional resilience, and this bill represents a proactive measure to address the interconnected issues of food security, mental health, and substance use.

Moreover, investing in food assistance programs has the potential to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to the long-term stability of individuals and families. By ensuring that more individuals have access to the resources they need, we can create a stronger, more resilient community.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



James Savage, Chair
Alaska Mental Health Board



Renee Schofield, Chair
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and
Drug Abuse